



Regional Water Program

2009



Rivers are the lifelines of the Middle East. The Nile River flows through the desert in Aswan, Egypt.

(Photo: USAID/OMEF)

CHAMPIONS AND FUTURE WATER LEADERS

USAID collaborates with, and supports forward-thinking decision makers who endorse a progressive philosophy and the Integrated Water Resource Management principles. USAID also identifies and trains the next generation of water leaders.

Improving efficiency in water use, encouraging recycling and sharing resources means tough choices requiring strong leadership. Without sound management, the billions of dollars already spent on water systems as well as future investments are at risk.

WORKING REGIONALLY AND ENGAGING PARTNERS

USAID's Office of Middle East Program implements regional water activities that:

- Are trans-boundary to improve cross-border cooperation and complement national water programs.
- Seek innovative approaches and serve as crucibles for new ideas.
- Compile and disseminate best practices to donors and partners in the region.
- Achieve economies of scale, and leverage resources, including through public-private partnerships.
- Use, expand or create regional water institutions as partners and tools to promote dialogue and prevent conflicts.

WATER IN THE MIDDLE-EAST & NORTH AFRICA REGION

Water touches all aspects of people's lives and plays a central role in every country's development. It affects health, livelihoods and incomes. Its availability and its quality can hinder or facilitate socio-economic development. Water management reflects the strengths and weaknesses of local, national, and international governance practices and influences the relationships between neighboring countries.

The Middle-East and North Africa (MENA) region must contend with aridity and a shortage of renewable freshwater resources. Ancient civilizations dealt with water scarcity by building extensive irrigation systems. Today however, population growth and increasing demands for food, housing, and jobs place extreme pressures on water resources throughout the region. Good water management matters here more than elsewhere as disputes over water may exacerbate political tensions. Mitigating conflict and meeting demands requires using existing renewable resources more efficiently. It requires a transformation of the culture and governance of water in the MENA region.

TRANSFORMING CULTURE & GOVERNANCE OF WATER TRANS-BOUNDARY COOPERATION OVER WATER

All the main rivers in the region cross national borders. Yet, there are few institutional agreements or entities in place to address international disputes and collaboratively manage resources.

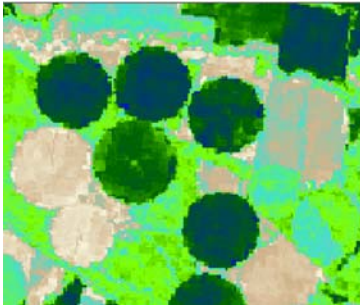
- To address this, USAID works with national governments and regional organizations to strengthen cooperation. This means joint monitoring of water quality and quantity and sharing information on



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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

REGIONAL WATER PROGRAM (CONTINUED)



Remote sensing output: water consumption by crops. Better water management starts with better data.

(Source: University of Idaho)



A farmer enjoys reliable water supply. There can be no sustainability without accountability.

(Photo: USAID/OMEP)

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national management plans, regional priorities, and projects for water use. The initial focus is on the Lower Jordan River, where USAID partners with Friends of Earth Middle East (www.foeme.org) to develop a trans-boundary dialogue and restore freshwater flows into the river.

IMPROVED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

The first step for sound water decision making and management is a proper understanding of the location, availability, and quality of water resources, and of their current and future uses. Obtaining good water information remains a challenge in the region, due to the costs of data collection and analysis, the absence of data management systems, and the lack of transparency of decision making processes.

- Space-based remote sensing techniques now enable the routine collection of accurate water data. Such data can easily be turned into information through maps and graphs that allow stakeholders participation and better, more informed decisions by water managers. To that end, USAID supports NASA's development of a regional Land Data Assimilation System (www.gsfc.nasa.gov).
- Water management is often a reflection of government performance. USAID initiated the Regional Water Governance Benchmarking project (www.rewab.net) in order to provide tools to compare, guide, and monitor national progress on water governance in the MENA region. This will be achieved through the definition, population, and regular updating of a set of indicators that describe water governance, and water service delivery capacity and performance.

ACCESS FOR THE POOR TO CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Governments and donors focus on expanding water supply and sanitation systems to meet the needs of growing populations. In spite of impressive investments, most utilities still do not adequately serve their constituencies.

USAID works with the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association (ACWUA) to help water utilities reach more customers with better quality services.



A child enjoys an unusual shower. Clean water is precious.

(Photo: USAID/OMEP)